

FASTING

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- I. Demystifying fasting
 - a. Fasting is not something that is talked about regularly in most churches
 - b. A small portion of Americans make fasting a regular part of their lives
 - c. It seems legalistic
 - d. We are tainted by Gnosticism/dualism that elevates the spirit and denigrates the value of the body
 - e. It seems intimidating—it is only for the super-spiritual
- II. Viewing fasting within the big picture

- a. *Our body, mind, and spirit are all important to God and a part of the Christian walk. Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.* 1 Thessalonians 5:23
- b. The spiritual disciplines are about achieving a balance in life that helps us learn how to operate in the spiritual realm. Spiritual disciplines connect us to a power greater than our own—the Spirit of God.

Disciplines of abstinence	Disciplines of engagement
Solitude	Community
Silence	Worship
Secrecy	Confession
Sabbath	Vocation
Fasting	Feasting
Bible reading	Prayer
Submission	Service

- c. Purposes of fasting
 - i. Strengthen your spirit
 - ii. Deepen your relationship with God
 - iii. Weaken the attachment to physical realities in order to open ourselves to spiritual realities. [Reach upward rather than downward]
 - iv. Love God for God alone and not for the benefits and blessings he gives us (this is true of all disciplines of abstinence)
- d. Fasting is more about the mind than it is about the body, and it is more about the spirit than it is the mind
- e. Fasting is not about legalism; it is about blessing
- f. The very first command was about the feasting/fasting balance
The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.” Genesis 2:15-17
- g. Similar to tithing, giving up what you think you need opens you up to the abundance of the heavenly realm

III. Reasons for fasting found in the Bible

- a. Fasting is a type of intercession
 - i. *They said to me, “Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the*

- gates have been destroyed by fire.” When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven... O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me Put it into his heart to be kind to me.” Nehemiah 1:3-4, 11*
- ii. *And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before our God. We prayed that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. For I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to accompany us and protect us from enemies along the way. After all, we had told the king, “Our God’s hand of protection is on all who worship him, but his fierce anger rages against those who abandon him.” So, we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer. Ezra 8:21-23*
- b. Fasting helps us elevate our spirit to a more prominent place.
 - i. *For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Romans 8:13-14*
 - c. Fasting deepens our relationship of love and dependency on God
 - i. *Remember how the LORD your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Deuteronomy 8:2-3*
 - d. Fasting helps us discern God’s will
 - i. *Jehoshaphat was terrified by this news and begged the LORD for guidance. He also ordered everyone in Judah to begin fasting... As all the men of Judah stood before the LORD with their little ones, wives, and children, the Spirit of the LORD came upon one of the men standing there. He said, “Listen, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Listen, King Jehoshaphat! This is what the LORD says: Do not be afraid! Don’t be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God’s. Tomorrow, march out against them. You will find them coming up through the ascent of Ziz at the end of the valley that opens into the wilderness of Jeruel. But you will not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the LORD’s victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out against them tomorrow, for the LORD is with you!” 2 Chronicles 20:3, 13-17*
 - ii. *One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.” So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way. Acts 13:2-3*
 - e. Fasting is affiliated with repentance
 - i. *And the Ninevites believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least. When word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let no man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything at all. They must not eat or drink. Furthermore, let both man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and have everyone call out earnestly to God. Let each one turn from his evil ways and from the violence in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent; He may turn from His fierce anger, so that we will not perish.” When God*

saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—He relented from the disaster He had threatened to bring upon them. Jonah 3:5-10

- f. You become more receptive to God speaking to you through your senses when you remove the interference.
 - i. *For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Hebrews 5:13-14*
 - ii. “Senses” means physical senses. Sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. There is a spirit-body connection through which God reveals things to us. You can grow in your ability to use these faculties. But when your body is filled with too many other things, you lose spiritual sensitivity. This is why we are so frequently commanded to remain sober.

- IV. Fasting is a practical way to fulfill certain commands from Scripture. This is not to say that these passages are all specifically and only about fasting. But after I point these out to you, you will see them in a new light. Fasting is a very real, tangible way of committing to these commands, similar to the way the physical act of baptism is a commitment to a faith relationship with Jesus.
- a. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Matthew 5:6*
 - b. *Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2*
 - c. *Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. Colossians 1:24*
 - d. *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 1 Peter 4:1-2*
 - e. *All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So, I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:25-27*
 - f. *We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. 2 Corinthians 4:7-10*
 - g. *Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 Corinthians 6:16-17*
 - h. *Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God. 2 Corinthians 7:1*
 - i. *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20*
 - j. *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23*
 - k. *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I*

have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:7-11

- i. *Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Philippians 3:17-21*

V. Let's get practical

- a. The standard American diet is so bad, most of us can't go directly into an extended fast without serious difficulty. Suggestion: first teach your body to burn fat again (keto diet)
- b. Start by extending the fast you already do
- c. When you do go into a water fast, you will soon begin to expose weaknesses. You will have a choice: honesty, confession, grief—or hiding, blaming, avoiding. (Garden of Eden, Genesis 3—don't be like Adam)
 - i. Humble yourself and he will lift you up (James 4:10)
 - ii. Naked and Afraid: people get pretty ugly when they haven't eaten for a while, their pride confronts their weakness, and they have a choice to grow or to stay in their pride and denial. Those who choose to grow succeed.
- d. Do something that is genuinely a sacrifice and that is difficult
- e. Drink lots of water and electrolytes
- f. Each time you feel hunger, pray
- g. Learn to accept hunger as a good thing
- h. Part of what Jesus did in the wilderness was silence. All other voices were stilled so he could learn how to discern the voice of God. Psalm 1:1-2
- i. If the average American replaced the amount of time they sat in front of screens with reading the Bible, they would get through the whole Bible about 2.8X in 40 days. (Or...you could read the whole Bible in 2 weeks)
- j. Let God work out with you what to do during your fast
 - i. Intermittent fasting
 - ii. Skipping lunch
 - iii. Cutting out specific foods (carbs, meats, alcohol, desserts)
 - iv. Fasting all food one or two days/week
 - v. Setting aside specific time for prayer/Bible reading
 - vi. Word and thought fast—only positive words and thoughts for 40 days
- k. Expect to fail. That's part of the process. Failure only ends in failure when you stop trying. Success is never giving up.
- l. **Keep the main thing the main thing: this is about deepening your relationship with God. It is about dancing with God to a new tune. Relationships don't follow carefully planned scripts. There is growth, setbacks, frustrations, renewed understanding, and ultimately true partnership.**